

NORTHFIELD CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Minutes of the meeting on January 14, 2015

The meeting was called to order by Pam Knox at 6:40 pm.

I. ROLL CALL: Present were Commissioners Pam Knox, Leslie Matthews, Ruth Ruttenberg, Christine Barnes, Laura Hill-Eubanks; Russ Barrett called in to conference at 7:20. Kristen Sharpless attended by invitation of the NCC.

II. SET/ADJUST AGENDA

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (scheduled): None

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: December 11, 2014 minutes approved 4-0-1.

V. DISCUSSION

- a. **Forest Stewardship plan:** Ecologist Kristen Sharpless was invited to inform the commission about the process of writing a Town Forest Management Plan. The NCC is working on a management plan for the Town Forest on Paine Mountain. Kristen prepared the town forest management plans for Waitsfield, Barre City, and Hinesburg. She recommends drafting goals and strategies and then soliciting public input before writing the final plan. Selectboard would sign off on final plan. A consultant could draft the plan with the NCC.

The surveys and plans already completed would be incorporated into the town forest management plan (forest timber management plan, Audubon Forest Bird Habitat Assessment). A natural resources survey was conducted by the NCC but we do not have a formal Natural Resources Inventory, which would be beneficial to assess potential impacts, and any wildlife, habitat, and water resources to be protected. Kristen recommends we ask the LANDS group to help with trails assessment; County Forester would be helpful; funds would be needed to hire a consulting ecologist. Kristen recommends a NCC member with knowledge of the town forest walk the forest with whomever is assessing it and working on the plan to point out areas that may be important or sensitive. Assess any trails to determine which might be compatible with which uses.

Enforcement may be an issue if illegal trail cutting (which has been noted), or uses not approved occur. If trails were open to mountain biking it would help if an organized club were made responsible for maintenance, management and enforcement of rules and policies. The town could also step in if problems occur.

Russ explained that logging and a timber sale were scheduled in the forest and NCC discussed the need to ensure protection of sensitive areas and allowing for habitat that supports diverse types of wildlife. Forestry AMP's will be used. It

was suggested that money from the timber sale be used to support the NCC's efforts in planning and managing the forest, with the approval of the Selectboard. Russ will update the forest plans to include new plots and wildlife values. NCC discussed sending the current forest/timber management plans (prepared by Russ and Rose Beatty), bird assessment and surveys to Audubon in order to allow them to help prepare a plan that would incorporate those documents. Kristen recommends the NCC review the Audubon's guide for managing for bird habitat.

Mountain bikers have asked the NCC for use of trails in the town forest. There are apparently no immediate plans to complete Phase 2 of the Norwich U bike park and mountain bikers now want more access to the Town Forest lands for expanded biking opportunities. One proposal from a biker would allow bikers the sole use of an existing trail only, with hikers obtaining access to other trail points at alternative sites (which have not been developed yet). It was noted that hikers do not have an organized group but the NCC would like to get as much input from them as possible. The need for determining how to balance various recreation uses and conservation was discussed and will be discussed further as a plan is developed. Commissioners will work on visions and goals for the next meeting. Christine and Laura will meet with the Chair of the Waitsfield Conservation Commission, which prepared the Waitsfield town forest management plans, to get his input and advice on developing a management plan.

- b. Joint PC/CC/RPC meeting:** Laura will contact Michele to set up a joint meeting to update the PC and CVRPC on forest stewardship projects.
- c. Town Report:** Leslie will draft the NCC report for the annual town report. Commissioners will send Leslie information for the report.
- d. Tree Grant:** Ruth informed the NCC about the completed report on the Dog River assessment carried out by the LANDS group and with the assistance of Ruth and Christine. The report should be sent to the Town and distributed for public review. It was noted that it was a very well done report and the LANDS group is great to work with.

Ruth and Pam will work on the current grant for educating local students about the forest and forest pests. Pam will work on a timeline for the next meeting.

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (unscheduled): None.

VI. ADJOURNMENT: The meeting was adjourned at 8:55.

Respectfully submitted by Laura Hill-Eubanks, Northfield Conservation Commission.

These minutes are subject to changes and approval at the next regular meeting, but are substantially correct.